

NCA
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WAR CRIMES -- THE SEARCH GOES ON

ANNCR:

MORE THAN A GENERATION AFTER THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO, POLAND EXPECTS TO CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO PUNISH NAZI WAR CRIMINALS FOR YEARS TO COME. VOA CORRESPONDENT MARK HOPKINS SENDS THIS REPORT FROM WARSAW.

ANNCR:

THE HORRORS AND DESTRUCTION OF WORLD WAR TWO IN POLAND DIM WITH THE YEARS, OF COURSE. BUT THE HIGH COMMISSION FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF NAZI CRIMES, NOW MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS OLD, COULD FUNCTION FOR STILL ANOTHER GENERATION. CAREFULLY COMPILED STATISTICS OF THE COMMISSION ARGUE THAT EVEN BY NINETEEN EIGHTY, SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT OF GERMANS THEN LIVING, AND SUSPECTED OR ACCUSED OF WAR CRIMES, WILL STILL BE UNDER THE AGE OF SEVENTY. THAT IS, POLISH AUTHORITIES STILL BELIEVE THAT THOUSANDS OF GERMANS REMAIN WHO HAVE NOT STOOD TRIAL FOR CRIMES THAT CLAIMED THE LIVES OF SIX MILLION POLISH CITIZENS --- ALL BUT ONE HALF MILLION IN CONCENTRATION AND EXTERMINATION CAMPS, THE MAJORITY JEWS, BUT ALSO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF OTHER POLES, PLUS SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR.

A COURT AND THIRTY DEFENSE LAWYERS HAVE JUST COME HERE FROM DUSSELDORF, WEST GERMANY, FOR FIRST HAND INVESTIGATION OF THE MAJDANEK EXTERMINATION CAMP. THE CASE INVOLVES FIFTEEN DEFENDANTS. THE WEST GERMAN COURT IS ONE OF TWENTY THAT HAS TRAVELED TO POLAND SINCE 1958 WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE POLISH HIGH COMMISSION. THE COMMISSION HAS SUPPLIED

VAST AMOUNTS OF DOCUMENTATION TO WEST GERMAN COURTS IN THE PROSECUTION OF WAR CRIMES, INCLUDING WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND WITNESSES.

THE POINT IS ARGUED HERE BY POLISH AUTHORITIES THAT THE MAJORITY OF NAZI WAR CRIMINALS ENDED UP IN WEST GERMANY AFTER THE WAR. IT IS ALSO ARGUED THAT LESS THAN TEN PERCENT OF NEARLY EIGHTY THOUSAND WHO WERE ACCUSED WERE FOUND GUILTY IN WEST GERMAN COURTS. BY CONTRAST, POLISH AUTHORITIES POINT OUT, OF SOME SIX THOUSAND GERMANS TRIED ON POLISH TERRITORY, ALL BUT TWO HUNDRED WERE SENTENCED. AND OF FOURTEEN THOUSAND POLISH CITIZENS TRIED IN CONNECTION WITH WAR CRIMES, TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SENTENCED.

THERE ARE STILL OCCASIONAL TRIALS HERE, BUT POLISH AUTHORITIES FOCUS ON WEST GERMANY. THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS WILL RUN OUT AT THE END OF 1980 ---AFTER WHICH, UNDER PRESENT LAW, NO ALLEGED WAR CRIMINAL CAN BE PROSECUTED. BUT POLISH AUTHORITIES HAVE ALREADY DECIDED THAT THEY WILL PRESS FOR AN EXTENSION OF THAT DATE --- AS IT WAS EXTENDED ONCE BEFORE UNDER FORMER CHANCELLOR WILLY BRANDT.

POLISH OFFICIALS REALIZE THAT WITH THE YEARS, KNOWN OR SUSPECTED WAR CRIMINALS AGE BEYOND THE TIME TO BE PUNISHED. THEY ARGUE THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL, HOWEVER, TO DOCUMENT THE GUILT OF NAZI CRIMINALS IN A COURT OF LAW. AND POLISH AUTHORITIES SAY TOO THAT THE CONCERN HERE IS NOT TO FIND THOSE WHO KILLED JUST POLISH CITIZENS, JEWS AND OTHERS, BUT WHO COMMITTED ATROCITIES AGAINST PEOPLE OF FIFTY DIFFERENT NATIONS ON POLISH SOIL.